

## **“The Manifestation Of The Spirit”**

### **Psalm 8**

O LORD, our Sovereign,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.

Out of the mouths of babes and infants

you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,

to silence the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,

the moon and the stars that you have established;

what are human beings that you are mindful of them,

mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God,

and crowned them with glory and honor.

You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;

you have put all things under their feet,

all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,

the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,

whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

# The Order Of Things

Psalm 8

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## I.

Fair warning, this sermon might quickly get away from us and, perhaps, that is just as well. Moreover, perhaps we should let it.

One of the real benefits of living in one place for a long time is the understanding that is gained regarding the order of unfolding in the natural world. By virtue of living in the North Country, a geographical area and climatological region which is more rural and varied, our seats to the show are necessarily a little closer to the stage with a clearer view of the unfolding play.

While this order of unfolding is particularly evident when living in close association and in close proximity to the natural world, once you open your eyes to it (or *have* your eyes opened to it) you can go on to discover such an unfolding is happening all the time, everywhere and with all things.

## II.

This is a remarkable time of year, when the world comes alive after a long dormancy and seeming stillness. Trees leaf and bloom, grass grows and greens, the world bursts with color, birth follows mating and foraging begins, the air is filled with birdsong, bugs hatch, fish jump, days lengthen, the earth warms and spirits stir. All in the same order of unfolding as the ages that came before and, we expect, in the ages yet to come.

Such a cycle brings both succor and comfort to the span of *all* our days amid the randomness which will be found in any *one* particular day. There is a confidence or expectation in witnessing the linearity of life which slowly bends, then curves, and finally spirals around itself to move through time and space with what we perceive to be a certain direction which, we hope, belies a greater purpose or meaning in which we might have a role.

### III.

Today's scripture reading, the mere 8 verses that constitute the totality of Psalm 8, is an effort to consider the big picture within which we all find ourselves; and the sense of awe and humility which results in attempting to do so. The approach taken by the psalmist is one which has been shared by every mortal soul that has walked this earth: look up, look around and, then, look down.

When we look *up* to the heavens, with sun and moon, stars and planets, we begin to imagine the vastness of the cosmos, and our small place in it; "what are human beings that you, O God, are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them." When we look *around* we see those with whom we share the land and this planet, "sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas"; the multitude of living things for which humanity has been given responsibility. Having seen and understood the height and breadth of the creation and our place in it we, then, look *down* in humility as we stand before the one who created each thing and all things; our majestic sovereign.

### IV.

For this is the order of things: the One Creator bringing forth the creation *ex nihilo*, or out of nothing, with fine fingers crafting galaxies, mountains and valleys, sea and sky, all that lives and every atom that forms everything that is. Made to be a little lower than God, we have been crowned by that God with glory and honor for the unique purpose of understanding the distinction between the Creator and the creation; and the order of things which flows out from there. It is the course, the direction, and the means by which this order flows, that interests us most this morning as we, too, look up, look around and, then, look down.

### V.

These past few months have found me intensely curious to consider and understand the flow and the order of things. It is planting time, as the ground that was first turned, then tilled is now furnished with seed to grow, flourish and, eventually, flower and fruit. Take a drive out into the county at this time of year and you will see neat, parallel rows of green sprouts equally spaced one

from another spreading out for acre after acre with a distinct orderliness which we rightly imagine to be a function of efficiency and maximized utility.

When we consider the order of things, both for the world, in general, and our own lives, in specific, we discover and appreciate the linearity of life which informs how we might best employ our imagination, our time, our toil, and our limited resources to achieve the greatest gain for the least amount of effort.

## VI.

Except that, now, I am not so sure that this is at all the case, nor has it ever been the case. In fact, I am beginning to get the sneaking suspicion that while not necessarily an illusion, linearity isn't nearly as pervasive as initially perceived, and certainly not all it is cracked up to be. Thankfully, I am becoming increasingly comfortable with such a realization, if not somewhat delighted and amused; and, frankly, it comes as something of a relief.

Truth is, I've always been a fan of chaos; more specifically, of *Chaos Theory*, which is an interdisciplinary area of scientific study and branch of mathematics focused on underlying patterns and deterministic laws of complex systems whose behavior is *highly* sensitive to slight changes in conditions, such that even small alterations can give rise to strikingly great consequences. I mean, how much fun is that!?!

## VII.

Taking a lesson from last week's sermon which reminded me (once again) that while interesting and germane, I have a tendency to over intellectualize. Or, said another way, I'm a glutton for the punishment of the linear thinking inherent in the philosophical, technical and mathematical. At the end of the day, though, I am a mere tourist in those countries, or an expatriate working abroad at best. My true nation of origin is the theological and however much I enjoy my time away it is wonderful to get back home again.

Hence, let me put a theological spin on all of this. One day, even before their *was* such a thing as day or night, the Lord God our Sovereign, decided to make a small alteration. Why God would do such a thing we have no idea; though I favor amusement, artistic expression or monotony as likely motivators. This small alteration was creating *something* where previously there had been only *nothing*.

## VIII.

The strikingly great consequence which resulted was, and still is, the creation. Ever the practical one, God recognized that the creation required a certain level of orderliness, or linearity, as supporting structure; think of it as vessel used to hold everything else. While we might marvel at the wonder and beauty of the vessel (and make no mistake, it *is* wondrous and beautiful) what is contained *within* the vessel is where the real adventure lies and greatest fun begins.

That is to say, life and love and the day-to-day unfolding of the order of things; which, as uncomfortable as it may sometimes be for us to admit, has an underlying flow of chaos running through it. At the very heart of all this, is the *something* we choose to create out of the *nothing* of ashes and dust from whence we came and to which, some day, we will return.

## IX.

And that is it, *that* is the sermon. Does it make sense, in a linear kind of way? Parts of it, for sure. Does it hold together? Well, I wouldn't go so far as to say it falls apart. Have your eyes been opened to seeing the world in a new way? Perhaps, but the better question is will *you* open *your* eyes to it? Did this sermon quickly get away from us? Well, "quickly" is a matter of opinion, but I think we can all agree this is a far shorter sermon than usual and it *did* get us away from how we usually think about how we live, move and have our being. Which, at least every once in a while, is just as well.

Moreover, maybe the real lesson for us today is we should not be so afraid to let it. I mean, who knows what strikingly great consequence might be achieved by such a slight alteration in the order of things? Amen.